UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

In Recital

STEVE BRYANT, violin

and

MICHAEL REDSHAW, piano

Wednesday, March 2, 1988 at 8:00 p.m.

The Three Violin Sonatas of Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Sonata No. 1 in G Major, Op. 78 (1878-79)
- Vivace ma non troppo
- Adagio
- Allegro molto moderato

Sonata No. 2 in A Major, Op. 100 (1886)
- Allegro amabile
- Andante tranquillo; Vivace; Andante; Vivace di piu; Andante; Vivace
- Allegretto grazioso

INTERMISSION

Sonata No. 3 in D Minor, Op. 108 (1886-89)
- Allegro
- Adagio
- Un poco presto e con sentimento
- Presto agitato

Convocation Hall, Old Arts Building

Programme notes for the Three Violin Sonatas of Johannes Brahms

It was not until he was forty-six that Brahms first released a violin sonata for publication. This work bears the opus number 78, and was composed after the first two symphonies and the Violin Concerto. All trace of an earlier sonata written for his first concert tour has since been lost. It is significant that his six sonatas for piano with a melodic instrument were not written until after he had gained a wealth of experience in composition, by which stage we find his writing for piano now more transparent than had formerly been with the piano and melody instrument in an almost symphonic relationship.

Brahms's First Violin Sonata in G major, Op. 78, is generally known as the "Regenlied" Sonata on account of its thematic connection with the two Regenlieder from Op. 59. Brahms began work on the first Sonata immediately after his return home from a journey to Italy in 1878. He had brought the *Regenlieder* to Clara Schumann some years previously at a time when Clara was deeply depressed at the news that her first son, Ludwig, had had to be taken to an institution owing to a mental disorder, and that her daughter, Julie, had died in the November of 1872. Furthermore, her greatly gifted youngest son, Felix, Brahms's godson, was incurably ill with tuberculosis. When Clara received the Violin Sonata, it was full of meaning for her and she was deeply moved: *I really had to weep for joy... when I...rediscovered my melody which I love so fondly! I say mine, because I don't believe that this melody* [of the Regenlieder] *brings such bliss and sorrow to anyone else but me!*

The Second Violin Sonata in A major, Op. 100, one of a group of works, including also the Second 'Cello Sonata and the Piano Trio in C minor, was composed immediately after the Fourth Symphony. The parallels of the Second Violin Sonata with the history of the origins of the First Violin Sonata are very close; Brahms had spent three consecutive summers at the same place (this time Hofstetten on Lake Thun) and again, after writing a symphony he had produced works serene in content and abundantly melodic, including lieder, chamber works, and the Double Concerto. Once again, the Violin Sonata was associated with lieder. Most clearly evident to the ear is the connection between this Sonata and the lied *Wie Melodien zieht es mir leise durch den Sinn*, Op. 105, No. 1, from which the second subject of the first movement was evolved. The first bars of this Sonata also contain a quotation from another lied entitled *Komm bald*, Op. 97, No. 5. When one reads the texts of these songs, one realizes that in Violin Sonatas numbers 1 and 2, Brahms was making some kind of personal affirmation with which only those concerned could be aware of what he had in mind. These "absolute" works thus become a lyrical medium of communication.

Brahms began work on the Third Violin Sonata in D minor, Op. 108, about the same time as the second Violin Sonata but laid it aside until he was able to complete it at Thun in 1888. Both the outer movements are strongly constructed. The first movement contains a 45-bar-long pedal point, where the melodic line and its conterpoint are interwoven in the violin part; the final fourth movement owes its sense of unity to the constant presence of eighth notes, derived from the opening motive in the violin, in the piano bass, or in imitative inner piano part. This Sonata is not only the most advanced formally, it is also the only one with an independent Scherzo. It is more demanding and virtuosic in its piano writing than its two forerunners, as though Brahms had in mind the outstanding ability of the great pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow, to whom he dedicated it.